



Sweden

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 173,732 square miles, and its population is an estimated 9.0 million. Approximately 78.3 percent of the population belongs to the Church of Sweden. Since the Church and the State separated in 2000, increasing numbers of persons have left the Church each year. In 2004, 79,031 persons left the Church. According to studies carried out by the Church of Sweden, the main reason for persons leaving appears to be economic; membership carries a tax of 1.19 percent of members' incomes. In 2004, the Church of Sweden baptized 68.5 percent of children, a figure that has steadily declined over the past 2 decades. Confirmations have declined even more sharply; 37.6 percent of Swedish children were confirmed in 2004, as opposed to 80 percent in 1970.

There are an estimated 145,000 Roman Catholics, of whom 82,000 are registered with the Roman Catholic Church. Approximately 85 percent of Catholics are first or second generation immigrants, the largest groups coming from Southern Europe, Latin America, and Poland. Within the Stockholm Catholic Diocese, the Armenian, Chaldean, Maronite, Melchite, and Syrian churches celebrate Mass in their respective languages. Since the 1960s approximately 100 persons have converted to Catholicism annually.

The Orthodox Church has approximately 100,000 practicing members, and the main national Orthodox churches are Syrian, Serbian, Greek, Romanian, and Macedonian.

There is also a large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination.

While weekly services in Christian houses of worship generally are poorly attended, a large number of persons observe major festivals of the ecclesiastical year and prefer religious ceremonies to mark turning points in life such as weddings and funerals.

Those who attend Protestant churches, other than the Church of Sweden, total more than 400,000. The Pentecostal movement and the Missionary (or Missions) Church are the largest Protestant groups outside of the Church of Sweden. In 2004, the Pentecostal movement provided religious services to approximately 127,000 persons, of whom an estimated 90,000 were registered members. The 90,000 membership figure continues a steady decline from a peak of more than 100,000 in 1985. The Missionary Church provided services to approximately 129,000 members (registered and nonregistered).

The total number of Jews living in the country is estimated to be 18,500-20,000; however, the Jewish community estimates 10,000 active, or practicing, members. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish synagogues, found mostly in the cities. Large numbers of Jews attend High Holy Day services but attendance at weekly services is low.

The major religious communities and the Church of Sweden are spread across the country. Large numbers of immigrants in recent decades have introduced various religions to the country, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and a number of Christian churches other than the Church of Sweden in those communities populated by immigrants. These communities tend to be

concentrated in the larger cities.

Buddhists number approximately 15,000; Hindus between 7,000 and 10,000. There are estimated to be just over 1,000 Sikhs, and approximately 500 Zoroastrians. Reliable statistics on the number of atheists are not available; however, past estimates have placed the figure as high as 15 to 20 percent of the adult population.

The exact number of Muslims is difficult to estimate; however, it has increased rapidly through immigration in the past several years. The number provided by the Muslim community is approximately 350,000 members, of whom an estimated 100,000 are reportedly active. Muslim affiliations among immigrant groups are predominantly with the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam. There are mosques in many parts of the country.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has approximately 9,000 members.

A significant number of smaller, internationally active religious groups have also been established in the country but are viewed by the general public as lying outside of the mainstream. Such groups include the Church of Scientology (claiming to have approximately 3,000 members), Landmark-Forum, Hare Krishna, Word of Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 23,000 members), and the Unification Church.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The rights and freedoms enumerated in the Constitution include the rights to practice one's religion and protection of religious freedom. The laws concerning religious freedoms are observed and enforced at all government levels and by the courts in a non-discriminatory fashion. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private actors.

Since the separation of church and state in 2000, seven recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, raise revenues through member-contributions made through the national tax system. All recognized denominations are entitled to direct government financial support, contributions made through the national tax system, or a mix of both. The State does not favor the Church of Sweden at the expense of other religious groups in any noticeable way. Since the population is predominantly Christian, certain Christian religious holy days are considered national holidays, but this does not appear to affect other religious groups negatively. School students from minority religious backgrounds are entitled to take relevant religious holidays.

No recognition or registration is required to carry out religious activity. Religious groups that want to receive government aid may apply for it. The Government considers the number of members in the group and its length of establishment, but applies no specific criteria.

Religious education covering all major world religions is compulsory in public schools. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools, all of which receive government subsidies, provided they adhere to government guidelines on core academic curriculum.

The Office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination investigates claims of discrimination "due to race, skin color, national or ethnic origin, or religion." Discrimination on religious grounds is illegal, and specific legislation concerning the work place was introduced in 1999. In 2003, legislation concerning the provision of public and private services was enacted.

Following a 1998 public opinion poll that showed a low percentage of Swedish school children had even basic knowledge of the Holocaust, the Government launched nationwide Holocaust education projects. Approximately one million copies of the projects' core textbook are in circulation and available in many languages, at no cost, to every household with children.

In 2003, the Government established the Living History Forum, an official organization dedicated to promoting tolerance, democracy, and human rights using the Holocaust as a starting point. The Living History Forum, together with the Swedish Committee against Anti-Semitism, has planned a three-part educational program on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and Racism, to take place in the second half of 2005. Designed for teachers and others working in education, the program aims to establish a network of well educated and engaged individuals who can spread knowledge of the Holocaust.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives from various religious groups. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities (SST) is a government body consisting of 22 registered religious groups (37, including sub-groups) entitled to Government aid.

Many religious communities are involved in interfaith dialogue. However, in May 2004, the Jewish central council decided that the Jewish community should withdraw from official cooperation with the Church of Sweden after the launch of the Church's HOPP (HOPE) campaign for a just peace in the Middle East. Archbishop KG Hammar endorses the campaign, which includes a

recommendation to boycott Israeli goods originating from occupied territory.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The law requires animal slaughter to be preceded by the administration of anesthetics to minimize undue suffering by the animal. The Jewish community has protested that this prevents the practice of kosher slaughter in the country, requiring kosher meat to be imported. The Muslim community appears to be split between those who feel certain anesthetic methods do not conflict with halal requirements, and those who feel that it does.

Since 2001, the law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, in the case of boys under the age of 2 months, in the presence of a person certified by the National Board of Health. Approximately 3,000 Muslim boys and 40 to 50 Jewish boys are circumcised each year. The National Board of Health has certified Jewish mohels (persons ordained to carry out circumcision according to the Jewish faith) to carry out the operations, but a medical doctor or an anesthesia nurse must accompany them. Some members of the Jewish and Muslim communities have protested against the law on the grounds that it interferes with their religious traditions. This law is scheduled for a mandatory review and evaluation in 2005.

Individuals serving in the military are given the time and opportunity to fulfill religious requirements. The military makes available food options fulfilling religious dietary requirements and allows time for appropriate mourning periods. Some regiments have an imam attached to them to facilitate religious observance by Muslim soldiers. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service.

In 2003, the Home Guard (a rough equivalent to the National Guard in the USA) denied entry to a Muslim woman because of her use of a headscarf. As a result of this incident, the Office of the Ombudsman for Discrimination initiated a dialogue with the armed forces that resulted in new guidelines that allow the wearing of religious headwear. In 2005, a Sikh finished his military service, throughout which he wore a turban.

On June 27, 2005, the country's "Svenska Dagbladet" newspaper reported that the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination was suing Gothenburg city for two instances where Muslim women were turned away at a swimming pool because they were wearing arm-length tops. Pool employees maintain the clothing violated pool regulations. One of the women believed that she was turned away because she was wearing a veil. The Ombudsman has requested approximately \$19,230 (150,000 SEK) in compensation for each of the women.

In July 2004, Pentecostal Pastor Åke Green was convicted and sentenced to 1 month imprisonment under a hate-speech law that criminalizes agitation against ethnic groups. Green's conviction resulted from a sermon in which he condemned homosexuality, in part on the basis of biblical teachings. Green challenged the verdict on the basis of freedom of speech, and in February 2005 an appeals court ruled in Green's favor and overturned the conviction. In March 2005, the Prosecutor General announced the Government's intention to pursue the case against Green in the Supreme Court. In May 2005, the Supreme Court accepted the case, which it expects to hear later in the year.

In April 2005, a district court in Stenungsund sentenced a man to 2 months of imprisonment for hate-speech towards homosexuals and for violating a law governing on-line website content. The individual had posted on-line material that was judged to be offensive toward homosexuals. The individual appealed the conviction, arguing that the on-line content reflected his Christian convictions. As of June 2005, the appeal was pending.

Three trade unions and the Employers' Association agreed in April 2005 on compensatory holiday leave hours that will allow non-Christians to substitute their religious holy days for Christian holy days that are also national holidays.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Citizens are tolerant of diverse religious practitioners. However, some anti-Semitism exists, which occasionally takes the form of

vandalism or assault. It also appears that Muslims are sometimes subject to societal discrimination. Swedish law enforcement maintains statistics on hate crimes but does not break the figures down by categories relating to the targeting of specific religious groups, with the exception of anti-Semitic attacks. There are inadequate figures on incidents or crimes motivated by religious prejudice or intolerance towards members of the Muslim community. The Office of the Ombudsman for Discrimination received reports of discrimination on religious grounds, including religious affiliation, during the period covered by this report. Exact statistics are not available.

The number of reported anti-Semitic crimes has increased since the end of the nineties, and averaged approximately 130 annually during the period 2000-03, with 128 crimes reported in 2003. The largest single category of anti-Semitic crime in 2003 was agitation against an ethnic group with 52 reported incidents, and unlawful threat/molestation second with 35 reported incidents. There were three reported cases of assault during the same period. Some Jews believe that increases in attacks are directly linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and increased tensions in the Middle East at large. Since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, the Jewish Community in the country no longer sees its primary threats coming from neo-Nazis but from Islamic and leftist extremists.

In 2003, four young persons of Arabic origin broke into a Jewish-owned shop in Malmö, shouting anti-Semitic epithets and threats, after which they attacked the shop owner and another Jew. The shop owner was sent to hospital for treatment. Two weeks earlier, Muslims had thrown stones at employees of the Jewish Burial Society at the Jewish cemetery in Malmö. In June 2004, a football match between a Jewish and predominantly Muslim Somali youth team ended with the Jewish players being attacked by Muslim Somali players. More recent examples of anti-Semitic incidents include the harassment for being "from Israel" of a Jew at a commercial establishment in Stockholm in December 2004, and the burning of a swastika at a Jewish burial site in Norrköping in January 2005.

In 2003, the Islamic Center in Malmö in the southern part of the country, which includes a mosque, community center, and school, was seriously damaged in an arson attack.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The Embassy maintains regular contacts with local religious leaders, and Embassy officials have participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance. The Embassy has also nominated individuals to participate in International Visitor programs on religious diversity.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51583.htm)